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A SUGGESTION ON CORRELATING THE INSTRUCTION GIVEN IN THE MUSEUMS OF A COMMUNITY¹

THE expanding scope of museum instruction constantly offers new possibilities for broadening further the field of activity, and today I wish to direct your attention to one of these suggestions for increasing the usefulness of our work.

Many museums of all classes have established correlation with school courses, but as far as I know there has not been such coöperation between the different kinds of museums in a community. In referring to different kinds of museums, I have in mind particularly those devoted to natural history and ethnography, industries, including modern industrial processes and machinery, and to the arts. In many instances the community is served by one institution which contains more than one, perhaps all of these subjects under one roof. In such museums the coöperation is simpler. Where, as in New York, the organization is not unified, the connection between the instruction service in the different museums consists of a friendly sympathy with the purposes of the work, sometimes a friendly rivalry in obtaining results, but no studied combination of forces to achieve a larger result.

I suggest that the instructors in the different kinds of museums in a community should collaborate in preparing a course of study in their museums that would fit into school work, and would relate the different parts of the study in such a manner that the pupil might realize the unity as well as the variety of man's interests. The beginnings of things could be articulated with the most highly developed expression of art or of mechanical genius, and the student roused to an appreciation of man's invention and the power of his application throughout the existence of the race. Such study might help to instil a sense of the

dignity of labor as well as the glory of creative achievement, the satisfaction of work in spite of the drudgery of modern industry.

What should be the method of the collaboration? What subjects appear suitable? What classes of students would be benefited? The method may consist of the preparation of a course of study on a selected subject to be carried on with a group of persons using museum objects and related material. The course should be prepared by the instructors with such consultation as would be necessary to make the course unified. The outlines would refer the student from one chapter of the subject to another in order to emphasize the unity of the whole and to stimulate interest in the phases which follow.

Let me give an example. A class in commercial geography is studying the silk industry. The entire study can be carried on outside of the schoolroom. The natural history museum presents the opening chapters in the study of the silkworm, its life history, culture, distribution. The industrial museum contributes the material for the next phase, or if the community lacks a museum of industries, the manufactories may be utilized. Here can be studied the processes of manufacture, the making of the thread, the weaving and the dyeing, the history and the distribution of processes. The art museum follows with a study of pattern, the principles and history of design, the history of silk in Europe, silk fabrics and their uses, as in costume, furniture, rugs, etc. The study could be completed by visits to shops to view present-day fabrics and note designs. The class should be encouraged or required to make notes and sketches and to procure samples of present-day fabrics to compare with the historic for texture, quality, and design.

A number of subjects suitable for museum study fall under the head of the history of civilization. For instance, the fulfilling of man's needs:

- A. Food
- Science Museum:
- Raw Materials.

¹ Read by Mrs. Vaughan on May 23, 1917, before the American Association of Museums and to be included in their Proceedings. Published here by permission of the Association.

Primitive preparation.

Early fire-making methods.

Primitive utensils, as gourds, shells, stone and wooden vessels, baskets, pottery.

Art Museum:

Utensils; stone, pottery. The principles of beauty in utility. Shape, ornament.

Connection with rites and ceremonies.

B. Clothing

Science Museum:

Skins; shaping, sewing.

Beaten fibres.

Woven materials; grasses, unspun fibres. Spun fibres. Weaving.

Uncut costume (here reference may be made to a phase of the study to follow, in Greek dress). Design and ornament.

Art Museum:

History of costume.

Another section of the study might be devoted to shelter, completed in an outline course in architecture; or in furniture from the parfleche of nomadic North American Indians to the splendid cassone of Renaissance Italy.

History and geography are our points of mutual contact with the lower schools; but with specialized classes, like the schools of design, we find our common ground in

the principles of art, which are the same whether applied to barbaric or to historic patterns, although young designers sometimes forget this fact and lose sight of the essential elements of design in their desire for novelty. If people like Aztec gods instead of Greek flames, or Peruvian potatoes instead of Persian pomegranates on their brocades, let the designer draw potatoes, but let him remember that the laws of design do not vary with the motives used.

It might be argued that this instruction is the duty of the school, and not of the museum; but on the other hand, museum instruction consists chiefly of the exposition of its collections, which would include analysis of design of all ornamented surfaces, whether of Cherokee or of Chinese origin.

Besides the regular classes in public and private schools, I have in mind a special group of students who would benefit by the collaboration of museum instruction, and that is the classes from the schools of salesmanship in the large department stores. There are also other classes, not only of students, but of such groups as factory operatives, whose monotonous repetition of the same motion without a vision of the finished product quenches any joy in work. To bring to this dull labor the realization of its place in a long cycle is to bring to the worker pride in his own share and to ennoble the drudgery of commonplace occupation. A. L. V.

